nor does one look upon anyone except Allah as having the real power to give help in one's distress or need. Finally, one should pray for what one wishes to have. And there is every hope that a prayer made in this manner will be granted. (See Ahkam al-Jassās). The Sūrah also suggests that, in praying to Allah, one should pray for something so comprehensive that it includes in essence all possible human goals, for example, pray for being guided in the straight path, because if one can and does follow the straight path in everything that concerns this world or the other, one's material life or spiritual, one need not be afraid of stumbling or of being hurt.

Praising Allah is Man's Natural Demand

The first verse of the Surah teaches man to praise Allah. We praise someone either for a quality inherent in him or for a favour received from him. But the verse mentions neither. The implication is that the blessings of Allah are limitless. The Holy Qur'ān says: وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا (If you try to count the blessings of Allah, you will never be able to number them) (14:34 and 16:18). Leaving aside other things, if man only considers his own being, he would find that it is a microcosm -- in itself which contains in analogical form everything contained in the macrocosm, his body offers a parallel to the earth, the hair on it to the vegetation, his bones to the hills, his veins flowing with blood to the springs underground.[11]

Man, again, is composed of two parts, spirit and body, of which the spirit is obviously superior in value, while the body is subservient to it. In this inferior part alone, there are thousands of anatomical and biological wonders. There are supposed to be more than three hundred joints, but Allah has made each of them so strong that during the sixty or seventy years of an average man's life they are in perpetual motion and yet do not need repairs. Of this Allah himself has reminded us:

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11. It may not be out of place to remark that this analogical view of man's relationship with the universe has been an essential feature of all traditional cosmologies. The Copernican cosmology, whatever its merits may otherwise be, has tended to dissolve this vision of things, leaving man, at least in the West, to grow more and more alienated from the universe -- till we have arrived at the viewers of the American television who are reported to have been more interested in a ball game than in man's first landing on the moon -- Translator

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنٰهُمْ وَ شَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ

It is We Who created them, and it is We Who endowed their joints with strength (76:28).

Or, take the example of the eye. One may spend a life-time and yet not fully know the manifestations of divine wisdom present in it. Or, take a single movement of the eye, and see how many blessings of Allah are involved in its functioning. Before the eye can see, internally it requires physical energy which in its turn is provided by food, air, water etc. And externally it requires the light of the sun which in its turn depends on a thousand other factors. That is to say, all the forces of the universe join together to make it possible for the eye to see even once. Now, try to calculate how many times does the eye see in a day, in a year, in a man's life-time. Similarly, the functions of the ears, the tongue, the hands and the feet, each brings into action the forces of the whole universe.

This is a kind of blessing which is equally available to every living man, be he a king or a beggar. In fact, all the greatest blessings of Allah are the common property of every living creature -- for example, air, water, light, the sun, the moon, the stars, in fact, everything that exists in the heavens and the earth, or between them, offers its benefits to all without distinction.

Then there are special blessings which divine wisdom has chosen to distribute unequally among men, some getting more and others less. This category includes wealth, honour, health, peace, knowledge and other acquisitions. Although the general blessings are obviously much more important and essential for human life than the special blessings, yet man in his naivete takes them for granted and never realizes what great gifts they are in spite of being common.

Now, human nature itself requires that in recognition of the innumerable blessings that keep descending on him at every moment of his life, man should, as far as he can, praise and continue to praise his Benefactor. It is to indicate this basic need of human nature that the Holy Qur'ān employs the word اَلْحَمْدُ : *'Al-ḥamd'* (Praise) as the first word of the very first Sūrah. Thus, the praise of Allah has been accorded a very high rank among the acts of worship. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has

said that when, on receiving some kind of a blessing from Allah, His servant says اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ: (Praise belongs to Allah), it is like giving something better in return for what he has taken (Qurṭubī, from Ibn Majah, as narrated by Anas رضى الله عنه). According to another *ḥadīth* if a man, on receiving all possible blessings of the world, says: اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (*Al-ḥamdulillāh*), his act is superior to all those blessings. Commenting on this *ḥadīth* and citing certain scholars, al-Qurṭubī says, the ability to repeat the phrase '*Al-ḥamdulillāh*' with one's tongue is in itself a blessing of Allah. According to another authentic *ḥadīth*, saying this phrase fills half the scale on the side of good deeds in the Balance. As to what praising Allah should actually mean, Shaqiq ibn Ibrāhīm explains that when one receives some gift from Allah, one should first of all recognize the Benefactor, then be content with what He has given, and finally never disobey Him as long as one has some strength left in the body, which again is a gift from Allah. (See Qurṭubī)

The second element in the phrase is *Lillah*, which is composed of the preposition *Lām* (Arabic equivalent of the letter L) and the noun 'Allah'. This preposition means 'for' and is used for particularization, showing the exclusive possession of a thing or quality. So, the phrase implies that not only is it the duty of man to praise Allah, but in reality all praise belongs exclusively to Him, and no one else in the universe is worthy of it. At the same time, and by way of a further blessing, Allah has, for the purpose of teaching man how to behave with his fellow beings, commanded him to thank those too through whom the gifts of Allah come to him, for one who does not see the need of thanking his human benefactor would not thank Allah too.

Self-Praise is not permitted

It is not permissible for a created being such as man to praise himself. The Holy Qur'ān says: فَلَا تُزَكُّوْا اَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقٰى Do not pretend to be pure; He knows best who is really God-fearing) (53:32). That is to say, a man can be praised only if he fears Allah, but Allah alone knows to what degree a particular man possesses this quality, known as *Taqwā*. As for Allah praising Himself, the reason is that man is not capable of praising the glory and greatness of Allah in a befitting manner. Not to speak of others, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has

exclaimed: لَا أُحْصِيْ ثَنَاءً عَلَيْكَ (I cannot properly praise You!). Therefore, Allah Himself has taught man the mode of praising Him.

***Rabb* is the exclusive attribute of Allah**

The Arabic word *'Rabb'* (Lord) is applied to a person who not only possesses a certain thing, but is also fully capable of and responsible for nurturing it properly. Obviously, no one can act as *'Rabb'* with regard to the whole universe except Allah. So, the word, used in an absolute sense, is exclusive to Allah, and it is not permissible to address or describe anyone other than Allah as *'Rabb.'* A *ḥādīth* in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim explicitly forbids a slave or servant to call his master a *'Rabb'*. The word may, however, be employed in the case of a man too in a relative sense -- that is, in relation to a particular thing, for example, *'rabb al-dar'* (master of the house) etc. (Qurṭubī).

Seeking help from Allah

According to the great commentator and Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the verse إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ : 'You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help' means that one worships Allah alone and no one else, and that one turns for help to Allah alone and to no one else. (Ibn Abī Ḥatīm, Ibn Jarīr)

It has been reported from certain great scholars and saints of the earliest centuries of Islam that the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is the secret (i.e., the gist) of the entire Holy Qur'ān, and this verse is the secret of the whole Sūrah, for the first sentence of the verse is a declaration of one's being free from *Shirk*, or from all desire to associate anyone with Allah, and the second sentence is an expression of one's being exempt from all wish to trust in one's own power and will. Such an affirmation would naturally lead to putting oneself in the hands of Allah in all concerns. The Holy Qur'ān again and again commands us to do so: فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ :'Worship Him, and put your trust in Him'. (11:123); قل هو الرحمن آمَنَّا بِهِ وَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا :'Say He is the All-Merciful. We believe in Him, and we put all our trust in Him' (67:29); رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيْلًا :'He is the Lord of the East and the West; there is no god but He; so take Him for a guardian' (73:9). All these verses come to mean simply this -- a true Muslim should, in anything that he undertakes, rely neither on his own faculties nor on the help of a fellow creature, but should entrust himself completely to Allah, for He alone is All-Powerful, and He alone is the absolute helper.

Two doctrinal points emerge from this discussion. Firstly, it is totally forbidden to worship anyone except Allah, and associating anyone else with Him in worship is a deadly and unforgiveable sin. As we have already explained, *'Ibādah* (worship) signifies an utmost humility and willing self-abasement before someone out of the deepest love and veneration. If one behaves in this manner in relation to any created being, it is called *shirk* (association) in Islamic terminology. It basically follows from this definition of "worship" that "association" does not merely consist in attributing divine power to figures made out of stone or metal as idolators usually do; but obeying or loving or venerating someone to the degree which is reserved for Allah is also an "obvious association" (*al-shirk al-Jalii*). In recounting how the Jews and the Christians indulge in *shirk* (association), the Holy Qur'ān says: اِتَّخَذُوْٓا اَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ اَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ : 'They have taken their religious scholars and their monks as lords apart from Allah'. (9:31)

The Companion 'Adī Ibn Ḥatīm, who was a Christian before accepting Islam, asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ with reference to this verse as to why the Holy Qur'ān should blame the Christians for having taken their religious scholars as lords when they were never guilty of worshipping them. The Holy Prophet ﷺ in his turn asked him if it was not a fact that their scholars had declared many things as forbidden although Allah had permitted men to eat them, and that conversely they had declared as permissible what had been forbidden, and that the Christians obeyed their scholars in both the respects. 'Adī admitted that it was so. Therefore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ remarked that this was exactly how they 'worshipped' their scholars. This goes to prove that Allah alone has the right to establish what is permissible and what is forbidden. If one associates somebody else with Allah in this respect and, in spite of being familiar with the divine injunctions regarding what is permissible (*ḥalāl*) and what is forbidden (*haram*), goes against them, believing that someone other than Allah too can demand obedience in these matters, one is virtually worshipping him and being guilty of the sin of association (*shirk*). But, in order to guard against a possible misunderstanding, we may remark that this verse of the Holy Qur'ān, which condemns the worship of religious scholars, does in no way apply to the generality of Muslims who, not being

qualified to understand the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* by themselves or to deduce the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* from them, naturally depend on an *Imām*, a *Mujtāhid*, a *Mufti* or a religious scholar and follow his instructions in these matters. In fact, such Muslims are only acting in accordance with the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, and obeying divine commandments. For the Holy Qur'ān itself says:

فَاسْئَلُوْا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝

Ask the men of knowledge, if you yourselves do not know. (16:43)

Another thing which comes under the category of association (*shirk*) is to make votive offerings to someone other than Allah; so does praying to someone else in time of need or distress, for, according to a Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), praying is also an act of worship. Similarly, adopting such practices as are in general considered to be the signs or symbols of association also constitute the same sin. For example, the Companion 'Adī ibn Ḥatīm رضی الله عنه relates that when he embraced Islam and presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ with a cross hanging round his neck, the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked him to remove this idol. Although at this time the cross did not have the kind of signification for 'Adī which it has for Christians, yet he was asked to shun a symbol of 'association' externally as well. Among the symbols of 'association' are included practices like bowing (*rukū'*) or prostrating (*sajdah*) oneself before anyone except Allah, or going round a person or thing in the prescribed manner of the *tawāf* (circumambulation) of the *Ka'bāh*. Avoiding all such symbols of 'association' is a necessary part of the pledge of fidelity to Allah made in the phrase: 'You alone we worship'.

Seeking Allah's Help Directly and Indirectly

The other doctrinal point we mentioned is that one must turn to Allah alone for help and to no one else. This requires some clarification.

There is a kind of help which every man does seek from other men. The physical aspect of the universal order being what it is, it has to be so, and not otherwise. A tailor or tinker, a carpenter or a blacksmith, each is serving others, and everyone is obliged to seek his help. Seeking help of this kind neither is nor can be forbidden by any

religion, for it is part and parcel of the network of physical means provided to men by Allah. In the sphere of non-physical means too, it is quite permissible for one to seek the help of a prophet or a saint by asking him to pray to Allah in one's behalf, or to mention, while praying directly to Allah, the name of a prophet or a saint by way of a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing divine mercy upon oneself. Explicit Traditions (*aḥādīth*) and implicit indications of the Holy Qur'ān fully justify this practice, and it would be wrong to condemn it as being forbidden or to include it among the various forms of association (*shirk*).

Now, what sort of supplication for help is it which can be addressed exclusively to Allah and to no one else? And, when does one fall into the sin of *shirk* (association) in asking someone other than Allah for help? In reply to the second question, we may say that in this context the sin of *shirk* or association arises in two forms. Firstly, one becomes guilty of association, if one seeks the help of an angel or prophet or saint or any creature believing him to be omnipotent like Allah. It is such an obvious heresy that even idolaters and associators in general consider it as such, for even they do not look upon their idols and gods as being omnipotent like Allah. The second is the form adopted by idolaters and associators. They admit that God alone is Omnipotent, but also believe that He has delegated a part of His power to an angel or a prophet or a saint or to a smaller god who exercises a full and independent authority in that area, and to whom one may pray for help in matters within his jurisdiction. This is the supplication which the Holy Qur'ān forbids, and against which it warns us in the phrase إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ (to You alone we pray for help).

There is a simple reason for misunderstanding in this regard. Allah appoints many angels to perform quite a large number of functions even in the physical order of the universe; or, He makes many things happen through the prophets which are beyond the powers of man and which are called miracles (*mu'jizat*), as also other incredible wonders through the saints which are called *karāmat*. The appearance may easily lead a careless observer to ignore the reality, and to conclude from what he has seen that the angels or the prophets or the saints could not have worked such wonders if Allah had not

given them the necessary power and authority. This faulty argument which is no more than an illusion gives birth to the belief that the prophets or the saints enjoy absolute power and authority in their own degree. It is not so. Miracles and wonders are the direct acts of Allah, but they are manifested through prophets and saints so that people may recognize their spiritual station -- prophets and saints themselves have no powers to make such things happen. This fact is borne out by so many verses of the Holy Qur'ān. For example, the verse: وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلٰكِنَّ اللّٰهَ رَمٰى : 'When you threw, it was not you that threw, but Allah threw' (8:17) refers to a miracle of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in which he threw a handful of pebbles at an army of his enemies, and Allah willed it so that they smote the eyes of the whole army. The Holy Qur'ān attributes the act of throwing pebbles, not to the Holy Prophet ﷺ but to Allah Himself, which clearly shows that a miracle is manifested through a prophet ﷺ , but is in reality an act of Allah Himself. Similarly, when the people of Nūḥ, or Noah, عليه السلام demanded that, in order to establish his authenticity as a prophet, he should bring down on them the punishment and wrath of Allah, he replied: إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيكُمْ بِهِ اللّٰهُ إِنْ شَآءَ :'Allah will certainly bring it down to you, if He so wills' (11:33), in other words, he declared that he himself could not bring down divine punishment on them by way of a miracle. Another verse of the Holy Qur'ān reports what a group of prophets said to their people in reply to a similar demand: مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نَّأْتِيَكُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللّٰهِ :'We cannot give you proof, except by Allah's will' (14:11). This again was an admission that it was not in their power to produce a miracle, for all power rests in the hands of Allah. In short, it is not at all possible for a prophet or a saint to show a miracle whenever he likes and whatsoever he likes. The disbelievers used to demand specific miracles from the Holy Prophet ﷺ and from the earlier prophets عليهم السلام but Allah manifested only those which He Himself pleased, and not others. The Holy Qur'ān presents many such instances.

An ordinary example will make the discussion clear. In your room, you receive light from a lamp and air from a fan, but the lamp and the fan do not possess in themselves an absolute power to give you light and air, but need the electric current which they receive from the power house, and without which they cannot function. Giving you light

and air is, in actual fact, not the work of the lamp and the fan, but of the electric current which comes from the power house. Similarly, saints, prophets and angels, all depend on Allah in everything they do; it is Allah's power and will which makes things happen, though it manifests itself through prophets and saints as the electric current manifests itself through fans and lamps.

This example would also show that although prophets and saints have no power to make these things happen or come to be, yet their presence is not altogether irrevelant to what happens, you cannot have light and air in your room without there being a lamp and a fan. Likewise, you cannot have miracles or wonders without there being a prophet or a saint. There is, of course, a certain difference between the two situations. In spite of all the wirings and fittings being intact, you cannot have light without a lamp, nor air without a fan. But, in the case of miracles, Allah has the power, if He so wills, to manifest them even without the medium of prophets and saints. The usual way of Allah has, however, been that miracles are not manifested without the medium of prophets and saints; otherwise miracles would not serve the purpose for which they are intended.

To conclude, one must have firm faith in the doctrine that everything that happens is made to happen by the power and will of Allah, but it is also necessary to recognize the need for prophets and saints, and to admit their importance. Without such an admission, one would succeed neither in obeying divine commandments in the real sense nor in attaining Allah's pleasure exactly like the man who, being ignorant of the worth of lamps and fans, disregards them, and remains deprived of light and air.

The problems we have discussed above perplex many a mind. But the answer is essentially simple. Taking prophets and saints as a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing divine mercy upon oneself is neither absolutely permissible nor absolutely forbidden. There is a condition attached to it. If one does so, believing a prophet or a saint to be all-powerful, it becomes an act of *shirk* (association) and is hence forbidden. But if one takes a prophet or a saint to be no more than a medium.or a means, it is permissible. But one finds that in this matter people generally adopt either of the two extreme positions, outright

rejection of *wasilāh* or exaggerated veneration. The truth, however, lies between the two.

6. Success in this world and in the Hereafter

As we have said before, the prayer which the Holy Qur'ān has chosen to recommend to everyone, in every situation and for everything one does, is the prayer for being guided in the straight path. Just as success in the Hereafter depends on taking the straight path which leads one to Paradise, in the same way, if you come to think about it, success in all worldly concerns too depends on keeping to the straight path -- that is, on using the means and methods which habitually lead to the attainment of one's goal. Conversely, a little reflection will reveal that failure is always due to having strayed from the straight path. In view of the need for the straight path in worldly and other worldly concerns both, this is the prayer which should constantly be on the lips and in the heart of a true Muslim -- never as an empty verbal exercise, but with a sincere intention and with the meaning of the words fully present in the mind.

With Allah's help, the commentary on Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah ends here.



SŪRAH AL-BAQARAH

(The Cow)

MADINITE	بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ	286 VERSES

The name and the number of verses

According to the *aḥadīth* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the reports relating to his blessed Companions, the name of this Sūrah is Al-Baqarah. The *riwayah* or narration which prohibits this name is not authentic (Ibn Kathir). It comprises of 286 verses, 6201 words and 25500 letters (Ibn Kathir).

The period of revelation

The Sūrah is Madinite - that is to say, it was revealed at Madīnah after the Hijrah; some of the verses included here were revealed at Makkah at the time of the last Hajj of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, but, in accordance with the terminology of the commentators, they too are regarded as Madinite. This is the longest Sūrah in the Holy Qur'ān. It was the first Sūrah to be revealed at Madīnah, but different verses were revealed at different times, covering quite a long period so much so that the verses with regard to *riba* (interest or usury) were revealed in the last days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم after the conquest of Makkah. Actually, the verse:

وَاتَّقُوْا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُوْنَ فِيْهِ اِلَى اللّٰهِ

Fear the day when you will return to Allah (2:281),

is the very last verse of the Holy Qur'ān to be revealed - this happened on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah 10 A.H., when the Holy Prophet ﷺ was

in the course of performing his last Hajj, and only eighty or ninety days later he departed from this world, and the process of Divine Revelation came to an end for ever. (Qurtubi)

The merits of Sūrah Al-Baqarah

It is not only the longest Sūrah in the Holy Qur'ān, but also contains quite a large number of injunctions. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "Make a habit of reading the Sūrah Al-Baqarah, for reading it brings down on you the *barakah* or blessings of Allah, and neglecting it is a matter of regret, and a misfortune. And men of falsehood cannot overcome it". Al-Qurṭubī cites the blessed Companion Mu'awiyah to the effect that the men of falsehood referred to here are sorcerers, and the implication is that one who keeps reading this Surah becomes immune to the effect of black magic (Qurṭubī, from Muslim, as narrated by Abū Umamah Bahili). The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has also said that Satan flees from the house in which this Surah is read or recited. (Ibn Kathir from Hakim). Another *ḥadith* says that this Sūrah is the apex of the Holy Qur'ān, and that a retinue of eighty angels had accompanied each of its verses when it was revealed (Ibn Kathīr from Musnad Ahmad). The blessed Companion Abū Hurairaرضى الله عنه reports from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that there is a verse in this Sūrah which enjoys a superiority over all the other verses of the Holy Qur'ān, and that verse is the Verse of the *Kursi* (*Āyaṭ al-Kursī* 2:255) (Ibn Kathīr from Tirmidhī). The blessed Companion Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd says that ten verses of this Sūrah have such an efficacy that if one recites them at night, neither Satan nor *jinn* would enter one's house, nor would one and one's family be afflicted with illness or calamity or sorrow that night, and that if they are recited over a man suffering from a fit of madness, his condition will improve. The ten verses are these: the first four verses of the Sūrah, three verses in the middle (that is, the *Āyaṭ al-Kursī*, and the two following verses), and the last three verses of the Sūrah.

This Sūrah enjoys, with regard to its contents as well, a special distinction. Ibn al-'Arabī reports from his elders that in this Sūrah there are one thousand injunctions, one thousand prohibitions, one thousand subtle points of wisdom, and one thousand parables and references to historical events (Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr). That is why the

great Caliph 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ spent twelve years in learning and meditating over this Sūrah, and the blessed Companion Abdullāh ibn 'Umar spent eight years to learn it. (Qurṭubī)

As we have said, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah is the gist and the essence of the Holy Qur'ān. It deals with three basic themes - firstly, the affirmation of Allah as the Lord (*Rabb*) of the universe; secondly, the affirmation that Allah alone, and none else, is worthy of being worshipped; thirdly, the prayer for guidance. Thus, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah ends with the request for the straight path, and the whole of the Qur'ān is, in fact, an answer to this request - that is to say, the man who seeks the straight path will find it only in the Holy Qur'ān.

Hence it is that the Sūrah Al-Fātihah is immediately followed by the Sūrah Al-Baqarah which begins with the words, "That is the Book", indicating that this book is the straight path one has been seeking and praying for. Having defined the nature and function of the Holy Qur'ān, the Sūrah proceeds to state in a very brief manner the basic principles of the Islamic faith - namely, oneness of God, prophethood and hereafter (*Tawḥīd, Risālah, Ākhirah*). These principles have been presented in detail at the end of the Surah. In between, the Sūrah lays down the basic principles, and sometime even secondary rules in detail, for providing guidance to man in all spheres of life, modes of *'ibādah* (worship), ethics, individual and social behaviour, economic relationships, ways and means of improving oneself externally and internally.

Verses 1 - 5

الٓمّٓ ۝ ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ ۛ فِيْهِ ۛ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۝ الَّذِيْنَ
يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ يُقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَ مِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ۝
وَالَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِمَآ اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْكَ وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْاٰخِرَةِ
هُمْ يُوْقِنُوْنَ ۝ اُولٰٓئِكَ عَلٰى هُدًى مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَ اُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ ۝

With the name of Allah,
The All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Alif. Lam. Mim. That Book has no doubt in it - a

guidance for the God-fearing, who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in *salah*, and spend out of what We have provided them; and who believe in what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed before you, and do have faith in the Hereafter. It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord; and it is just these who are successful. (Verses 1-5)

The Sūrah begins with the Arabic letters *Alif*, *Lām* and *Mīm* (equivalents of A, L and M). Several Sūrahs begin with a similar combination of letters, for example, *Ḥā, Mīm,* or *Alif, Lām, Mīm, Ṣād.* Each of these letters is pronounced separately without the addition of a vowel sound after it. So, the technical term for them is مُقَطَّعَاتْ (*Muqatta'āt*: isolated letters).

According to certain commentators, the isolated letters are the names of the Surahs at the beginning of which they occur. According to others, they are the symbols of the Divine Names. But the majority of the blessed Companions and the generation next to them, the *Tabi'īn*, and also the later authoritative scholars have preferred the view that the isolated letters are symbols or mysteries, the meaning of which is known to Allah alone or may have been entrusted as a special secret to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم not to be communicated to anyone else. That is why no commentary or explanation of these letters has at all been reported from him. The great commentator Al-Qurṭubī has adopted this view of the matter, which is summarized below:

"According to 'Amir Āl-Sha'bī, Sufyān Al-Thawrī and many masters of the science of *Ḥadīth*, every revealed book contains certain secret signs and symbols and mysteries of Allah; the isolated letters too are the secrets of Allah in the Holy Qur'ān, and hence they are among the مُتَشَابِهَاتْ (*Mutashābihāt*: of hidden meaning), the meaning of which is known to Allah alone, and it is not permissible for us even to enter into any discussion with regard to them. The isolated letters are not, however, without some benefit to us. Firstly, to believe in them and to recite them is in itself a great merit. Secondly, in reciting them we receive spiritual blessings from the unseen world, even if we are not aware of the fact. Al-Qurṭubī adds: "The Blessed Caliphs Abū

Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Ali, and most of the Companions like 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ تعالی عنہ, firmly held the view that these letters are the secrets of Allah, that we should believe in them as having descended from Allah and recite them exactly in the form in which they have descended, but should not be inquisitive about their meanings, which would be improper". Citing Al-Qurṭubī and others, Ibn Kathīr too prefers this view. On the other hand, interpretations of the isolated letters have been reported from great and authentic scholars. Their purpose, however, was only to provide symbolical interpretation, or to awaken the minds of the readers to the indefinite possibilities of meanings that lie hidden in the Holy Qur'ān, or just to simplify things; they never wished to claim that these were the meanings intended by Allah Himself. Therefore, it would not be justifiable to challenge such efforts at interpretation since it would go against the considered judgment of veritable scholars.

The sentence "That Book has no doubt in it" raises a grammatical and exegetical problem, for the first phrase in the Arabic text reads as "ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ" :*Dhālikal kitāb*. Now, the word *dhālika* (that) is used to point out a distant thing, while the word *kitāb* (book) obviously refers to the Holy Qur'ān itself, which is present before us. So, this particular demonstrative pronoun does not seem to be appropriate to the situation. There is, however, a subtle indication. The pronoun refers back to the prayer for the straight path made in the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, implying that the prayer has been granted and the Holy Qur'ān is the answer to the request, which gives a detailed account of the straight path to those who seek guidance and are willing to follow it.

Having indicated this, the Holy Qur'ān makes a claim about itself: "There is no doubt in it". There are two ways in which doubt or suspicion may arise with regard to the validity or authenticity of statement. Either the statement itself is erroneous, and thus becomes subject to doubt; or, the listener makes a mistake in understanding it. In the latter case, the statement does not really become subject to doubt, even if someone comes to suspect it out of a defective or distorted understanding - as the Holy Qur'ān itself reminds us later in

the same Sūrah: إِنْ كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ :"If you are in doubt..." (2:23). So, in spite of the doubts and objections of a thousand men of small or perverse understanding, it would still be true to say that there is no doubt in this book - either with regard to it having been revealed by Allah, or with regard to its contents.

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ :"A guidance for the God-fearing": The Arabic word for the God-fearing is *Muttaqīn*, derived from *Taqwā* which literally means "to fear, to refrain from", and in Islamic terminology it signifies fearing Allah and refraining from the transgression of His commandments. As for the Holy Qur'ān being a guidance to the God-fearing, it actually means that although the Holy Qur'ān provides guidance not only to mankind but to all existents in the universe, yet the special guidance which is the means of salvation in the other world is reserved for the God-fearing alone. We have already explained in the commentary on the Sūrah "Al-Fātiḥah" that there are three degrees of divine guidance - the first degree being common to the whole of mankind and even to animals etc., the second being particular to men and *jinns*, and the third being special to those who are close to Allah and have found His favour, the different levels of this last degree being limitless. It is the last two degrees of guidance which are intended in the verse under discussion. With regard to the second degree, the implication is that those who accept the guidance will have the hope of being elevated to the rank of the God-fearing. With reference to the third degree, the suggestion is that those who are already God-fearing may receive further and limitless guidance through the Holy Qur'ān. This explanation should be sufficient to remove the objection that guidance is needed much more by those who are not God-fearing, for now we know that the specification of the God-fearing does not entail a denial of guidance to those who not possess this qualification.

The next two verses delineate the characteristic qualities of the God-fearing, suggesting that these are the people who have received guidance, whose path is the straight path, and that he who seeks the straight path should join their company, adopt their beliefs and their

way of life. It is perhaps in order to enforce this suggestion that the Holy Qur'ān, immediately after pointing out the attributes peculiar to the God-fearing, proceeds to say:

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ۝

It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord, and it is just these who are successful.

The delineation of the qualities of the God-fearing in these two verses also contains, in essence, a definition of Faith (*'Īmān*) and an account of its basic tenets and of the fundamental principles of righteous conduct:

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ۝

Who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in *Salah* and spend out of what We have provided them.

Thus, the first of the two verses, mentions three qualities of the God-fearing - belief in the unseen, being steadfast in *Salāh*, and spending in the way of Allah. Many important considerations arise out of this verse, the most significant being the meaning and definition of *'Īmān* (Faith).

Who are the God-fearing

The Definition of *'Īmān*

The Holy Qur'ān has provided a comprehensive defination of *'Iman* in only two words يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ "Believe in the unseen". If one has fully understood the meaning of the words *'Īmān* and *Ghayb*, one will have also understood the essential reality of *'Īmān*.

Lexically, the Arabic word *'Īmān* signifies accepting with complete certitude the statement made by someone out of one's total confidence and trust in him. Endorsing someone's statement with regard to sensible or observable facts is, therefore, not *'Īmān*. For example, if one man describes a piece of cloth as black, and another man endorses the statement, it may be called *Taṣdīq* (confirmation) but not *'Īmān*, for such an endorsement is based on personal observation, and does, in no way, involve any confidence or trust in the man who has made the statement. In the terminology of the *Sharī'ah*, *'Īmān* signifies accepting with complete certitude the statement made by a prophet

only out of one's total confidence and trust in him and without the need of personal observation.[1]

As for the word *Ghaib*, lexically it denotes things which are not known to man in an evident manner, or which are not apprehensible through the five senses. The Holy Qur'ān uses this word to indicate all the things which we cannot know through the five senses or through reason, but which have been reported to us by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. These include the essence and the attributes of Allah, matters pertaining to destiny, heaven and hell and what they contain, the Day of Judgment and the things which happen on that Day, divine books, all the prophets who have preceded the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in short, all the things mentioned in the last two verses of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah. Thus, the third verse of the Sūrah states the basic creed of the Islamic faith in its essence, while the last two verses provide the details.

So, belief in the unseen ultimately comes to mean having firm faith in everything that the Holy Prophet has taught us - subject to the necessary condition that the teaching in question must have come down to us through authentic and undeniable sources. This is how the overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars generally define *'Iman* (See al-'Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah, 'Aqa'id al-Nasafi etc.).

According to this definition, *'Īmān* signifies faith and certitude, and not mere knowledge. For, a mental knowledge of the truth is possessed by Satan himself, and even by many disbelievers - for example, they knew very well that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was truthful and that his teachings were true, but they did not have faith in him nor did they accept his teachings with their heart, and hence they are not Muslims.

The Meaning of 'Establishing' *Salāh*

2. The second quality of the God-fearing is that they are "steadfast in the prayer." The verb employed by the Holy Qur'ān here is

1. It would be helpful to note that in the everday idiom of the West, and even in modern social sciences, "faith" has come to mean no more than an intense emotional state or "a fixe emotion". As against this, the Islamic conception of *'Īmān* is essentially intellectual, in the original signification of "Intellect" which the modern West has altogether forgotten.

Yuqīmūna (generally rendered in English translations as "they establish", which comes from the word *Iqamah* signifying "to straighten out"). So, the verb implies not merely saying one's prayers, but performing the prayers correctly in all possible ways and observing all the prescribed conditions, whether obligatory (*Farḍ*) or necessary (*Wājib*) or commendable (*Mustahabb*). The concept includes regularity and perpetuity in the performance of *Ṣalāh* as also an inward concentration, humility and awe. At this point, it may be noted that the term does not mean a particular *ṣalāh*, instead, it includes all *farḍ, wājib* and *nafl* prayers.

Now to sum up - the God-fearing are those who offer their prayers regularly and steadfastly in accordance with the regulations of the Sharī'ah, and also observe the spiritual etiquette outwardly and inwardly.

Spending in the way of Allah: Categories

The third quality of the God-fearing is that they spend in the way of Allah. The correct position in this respect, which has been adopted by the majority of commentators, is that it includes all the forms of spending in the way of Allah, whether it be the *farḍ* (obligatory) *Zakāh* or the *Wājib* (necessary) alms-giving or just voluntary and *nafl* (supererogatory) acts of charity. For, the Holy Qur'an usually employs the word *Infaq* with reference to *nafl* (supererogatory) alms-giving or in a general sense, but reserves the word *Zakāh* for the obligatory alms-giving. The simple phrase: مِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ : "Spend out of what We have provided them" inspires us to spend in the way of Allah by drawing our attention to the fact that anything and everything we possess is a gift from Allah and His trust in our hands, and that even if we spend all our possessions in the way of Allah, it would be proper and just and no favour to Him. But Allah in His mercy asks us to spend in His way "out of" what (مِمَّا) he has provided - that is, only a part and not the whole.

Among the three qualities of the God-fearing, faith is, of course, the most important, for it is the basic principle of all other principles, and no good deed can find acceptance or validity without faith. The other two qualities pertain to good deeds. Now, good deeds are many; one could make a long list of even those which are either obligatory or

necessary. So, the question arises as to why the Holy Qur'ān should be content to choose for mention only two - namely, performing *Ṣalāh* and spending in the way of Allah. In answering this question, one could say that all the good deeds which are obligatory or necessary for man pertain either to his person and his body or to his possessions. Among the personal and bodily forms of *'Ibādat* (acts of worship), the most important is the *Ṣalah*. Hence the Holy Qur'an mentions only this form in the present passage. As for the different forms of *'Ibadat* pertaining to possessions, the word *Infaq* (spending) covers all of them. Thus, in mentioning only two good deeds, the Holy Qur'ān has by implication included all the forms of worship and all good deeds. The whole verse, then, comes to mean that the God-fearing are those who are perfect in their faith and in their deeds both, and that Islam is the sum of faith and practice. In other words, while providing a complete definition of *'Īmān* (Faith), the verse indicates the meaning of Islam as well. So, let us find out how *'Īmān* and Islam are distinct from each other.

The distinction between *'Īmān* and Islam

Lexically, *'Īmān* signifies the acceptance and confirmation of something with one's heart, while Islam signifies obedience and submission. *'Īmān* pertains to the heart; so does Islam, but it is related to all the other parts of the human body as well. From the point of view of the Shari'ah, however, *'Īmān* is not valid without Islam, nor Islam without *'Īmān*. In other words, it is not enough to have faith in Allah and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in one's heart unless the tongue expresses the faith and also affirms one's allegiance and submission. Similarly, an oral declaration of faith and allegiance is not valid unless one has faith in one's heart.

In short, *'Īmān*, and Islam have different connotations from the lexical point of view. It is on the basis of this lexical distinction that the Holy Qur'ān and Ḥadīth refer to a difference between the two. From the point of view of the *Sharī'ah*, however, the two are inextricably linked together, and one cannot be valid without the other - as is borne out by the Holy Qur'ān itself.

When Islam, or an external declaration of allegiance, is not

accompanied by *'Īmān* or internal faith, the Holy Qur'ān terms it as *Nifāq* (hypocrisy), and condemns it as a greater crime than an open rejection of Islam:

إِنَّ الْمُنٰفِقِيْنَ فِي الدَّرْكِ الْاَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ

Surely the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell. (4:145)

In explanation of this verse let us add that so far as the physical world goes, we can only be sure of the external state of a man, and cannot know his internal state with any degree of certainty. So in the case of men who orally declare themselves to be Muslims without having faith in their heart, the Shari'ah requires us to deal with them as we would deal with a Muslim in worldly affairs; but in the other world their fate would be worse than that of the ordinary disbelievers. Similarly, if *'Īmān* or acknowledgment in the heart is not accompanied by external affirmation and allegiance, the Holy Qur'ān regards this too as *kufr* or rejection and denial of the Truth - speaking of the infidels, it says:

يَعْرِفُوْنَهٗ كَمَا يَعْرِفُوْنَ اَبْنَآءَ هُمْ

They know him (that is, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم) as they know their own sons (2:146);

or in another palce:

جَحَدُوْا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَآ اَنْفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَّعُلُوًّا

Their souls knew them (the signs sent by Allah) to be true, yet they denied them in their wickedness and their pride. (27:14)

My respected teacher, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh used to explain it thus - the expanse which *'Īmān* and Islam have to cover in the spiritual journey is the same, and the difference lies only in the beginning and the end; that is to say, *'Īmān* starts from the heart and attains perfection in external deeds, while Islam starts from external deeds and can be regarded as perfect when it reaches the heart.

To sum up, *Īmān* is not valid, if acknowledgment in the heart does not attain to external affirmation and allegiance; similarly, Islam is not valid, if external affirmation and allegiance does not attain to confirmation by the heart. Imām Ghazzālī and Imām Subki both have arrived at the same conclusion, and in *Musāmarah*, Imām Ibn

al-Humām reports the agreement of all the authentic scholars in this respect.[2]

...who believe in what has been revealed to you and in what has been revealed before you, and do have faith in the Hereafter.

This verse speaks of some other attributes of the God-fearing, giving certain details about faith in the unseen with a special mention of

2. Today one finds a very wide-spread confusion, sometimes amounting to a total incomprehension, with regard to the distinction between Islam and 'Īmān, essentially under the influence of Western modes of thought and behaviour and, to be more specific, that of the ever-proliferating Protestant sects and schools of theology. Since the middle of the 19th century there have sprouted in almost every Muslim country a host of self-styled Reformists, Revivalists, Modernists et al, each pretending to have understood the "real" Islam for the first time, and each adopting an extremist, though untenable, posture with regard to Islam and 'Īmān. On the one hand, we have people claiming that Islam is only a matter of the "heart" (a word which has during the last four hundred years been used in the West as an equivalent of "emotion" or, worse still, of "emotional agitation") or of "religious experience" (a very modish term brought into currency by William James). As a corollary, they stubbornly refuse to see the need for a fixed ritual or an ethical code, all of which they gladly leave to social exigency or individual preference. They base their claims on the unquestioned axiom that religion is "personal" relationship between the individual and "his" God. It is all too obvious that this genre of Modernist "Islam" is the progeny of Martin Luther with cross-pollination from Rousseau. On the other hand, we have fervent and sometimes violent champions of Islam insisting on a merely external performance of rituals - more often on a mere conformity to moral regulations, and even these, of their liking. They would readily exclude, and are anyhow indifferent to, the internal dimension of Islam. A recent modification of this stance (in the wake of a certain Protestant pioneering, it goes without saying) has been to replace divinely ordained rituals by acts of social service or welfare, giving them the status and value of acts of worship. Counselling on divorce, abortion, premarital sex and the rest of the baggage having already become a regular part of the functions of a Protestant clergyman, it would not be too fond to expect, even on the part of our Modernists, the speedy inclusion of acts of entertainment as well. There is still another variety of deviationists, more visible and vociferous than the rest, and perhaps more pervasive and pernicious in their influence, finding easy credence among a certain section of Muslims with a sloppy western-style education. While dispensing with the subtle distinctions between Islam and 'Īmān, they reduce Islam itself to a mere system of social organization, or even to state-craft. According to their way of looking at things, if Muslims fail to set up a social and political organization of a specified shape, they would cease to be Muslims. Applied to the history of Islam, this fanciful notion would lead **(Continued)**

faith in hereafter. Commenting on this verse, the blessed Companions 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضی اللہ عنہم اجمعین have said that in the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ God-fearing Muslims were of two kinds, - those who used to be associators and disbelievers but accepted Islam, and those who used to be among the people of the Book (that is, Jews and Christians) but embraced Islam later on; the preceding verse refers to the first group, and this verse to the second. Hence this verse specifically mentions belief in the earlier Divine Books along with belief in the Holy Qur'ān, for, according to the *Hadīth*, people in the second group deserve a double recompense, firstly, for believing in and following the earlier Books before the Holy Qur'ān came to replace them, and secondly, for believing in and following the Holy Qur'ān when it came as the final Book of Allah. Even today it is obligatory for every Muslim to believe in the earlier Divine Books except that now the belief has to take this form: everything that Allah has revealed in the earlier Books is true (excepting the changes and distortions introduced by selfish people), and that it was incumbent upon the people for whom those Books had been sent to act according to them, but now that all the earlier Books

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(Continued) to the grotesque conclusion that no Muslim had ever existed. These are only a few examples of the intellectual distortions produced by refusing to define Islam and 'Iman clearly and ignoring the distinction between the two. Contrary to all such modernizing deviations, Islam in fact means establishing a particular relationship of obedience and servitude with Allah. This relationship arises neither out of vague "religious experiences" nor out of social regimentation; in order to attain it, one has to accept all the doctrines and to act upon all the commandments specified in the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith and the Shari'ah. These doctrines and commandments cover all the spheres of human life, individual or collective, right up from acts of worship down to social, political and economic relations among men, and codes of ethics and behaviour, morals and manners, and their essential purpose is to produce in man a genuine attitude of obedience to Allah. If one acts according to the Shari'ah, one, no doubt, gains many worldly benefits, individual as well as collective. These benefits may be described as the raison d'etre of the commandments, but are in no way their essential object, nor should a servant of Allah seek them for themselves in obeying Him, nor does the success or failure of a Muslim as a Muslim depend on attaining them. When a man has fully submitted himself to the commandments of Allah in everything he does, he has already succeeded as a Muslim, whether he receives the related worldly benefits or not.

and Shari'ahs have been abrogated, one must act according to the Holy Qur'an alone. [3]

3. Exactly as predicted by a Hadith, today we see all around us a proliferation of "knowledge" and of "writing". One of the dangerous forms the process has taken is the indiscriminate translation at least into European languages and the popularization of the sacred books of all possible religious and metaphysical traditions - not only the Hindu, the Chinese or the Japanese, but also the Shamanic or the Red Indian. The lust for reading sacred books has virtually grown into a mania, specially among the modern young people with their deep sense of being uprooted and disinherited, and all considerations of aptitude have been contemptuously set aside. In these circumstances, Muslims with a Western orientation are naturally impelled to ask themselves as to what they can or should make of such books which sometimes seem to offer similarities and parallels to the Holy Qur'an itself, and more often to the Sufi doctrines. The problem has already attained noticeable proportions, for in 1974 the government of Turkey found it necessary to ban the entry of certain Hindu sacred books like the Bhagavadgita and Upanishads. The correct doctrinal position in this respect is that it is obligatory for every Muslim, as an essential part of the Islamic creed, to believe in all the prophets and messengers of Allah and in the Divine Books (not in their distorted forms, but as they were originally revealed) that have specifically been mentioned by their names in the Holy Qur'an, and also to believe that Allah has sent His messengers and His books for the guidance of all the peoples and all the ages, and that Muhammad ﷺ is the last prophet and the Holy Qur'an the final Book of Allah which has come down to replace the earlier Books and Shari'ahs. As to the question of the authenticity and divine origin of a particular book held in reverence by an earlier religion or metaphysical tradition, a Muslim is not allowed to affirm such a claim unequivocally, nor should he unnecessarily reject such a possibility. In so far as contents of the book concerned agree with what the Holy Qur'an has to say on the subject, we may accept the statement as true, otherwise spiritual etiquette requires an average Muslim to keep quiet and not meddle with things which he is not likely to understand. As for reading the sacred books of other traditions, it should be clearly borne in mind that a comparative study of this nature requires a very special aptitude which is extremely rare, and hence demands great caution. A cursory reading of sacred books, motivated by an idle curiosity or by a craze for mere information, may very well lead to an intellectual disintegration or to something still worse, instead of helping in the "discovery of the truth" and the acquisition of "peace" which a comparative study is widely supposed to promise. Even when the aptitude and the knowledge necessary for the task is present, such a study can be carried out only under the supervision of an authentic spiritual master. In any case, we cannot insist too much on the perils of the enterprise.

An argument to the Finality of Prophethood

The mode of expression helps us to infer from this verse the fundamental principle that the Holy Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is the last of all the prophets, and the Book revealed to him is the final revelation and the last Book of Allah. For, had Allah intended to reveal another Book or to continue. The mode of revelation even after the Holy Qur'ān, this verse, while prescribing belief in the earlier Books as necessary for Muslims, must also have referred to belief in the Book or Books to be revealed in the future. In fact, such a statement was all the more needed, for people were already familiar with the necessity of believing in the Torah, the Evangile and the earlier Books, and such a belief was in regular practice too, but if prophethood and revelation were to continue even after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , it was essential that the coming of another prophet and another book should be clearly indicated so that people were not left in doubt about this possibility. So, in defining *'Īmān*, the Holy Qur'ān mentions the earlier prophets and the earlier Books, but does not make the slightest reference to a prophet or Book to come after the last Prophet ﷺ . The matter does not end with this verse. The Holy Qur'ān touches upon the subject again and again in no less than forty or fifty verses, and in all such places it mentions the prophets, the Books and the revelation preceding the Holy Prophet ﷺ but nowhere is there even so much as a hint with regard to the coming of a prophet or of a revelation in the future, belief in whom or which should be necessary. We cite some verses to demonstrate the point:

وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And what We have sent down before you. (16:43)

وَلَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّنْ قَبْلِكَ

And We have certainly sent messengers before you". (40:78)

وَلَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا

And certainly before you We have sent messengers. (20:47)

وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And what was revealed before you. (4:60)

وَلَقَدْ اُوْحِیَ اِلَیْكَ وَ اِلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And it has certainly been revealed to you and to those who have gone before you... (39:65)

كَذٰلِكَ یُوْحِیْٓ اِلَیْكَ وَ اِلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

Thus He reveals to you and He revealed to those who have gone before you. (42:3)

كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ

Fasting is decreed (literally, written) for you as it was decreed for those before you. (2:183)

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُّسُلِنَا

Such was Our way with the messengers whom We sent before you. (17:77)

In these and similar verses, whenever the Holy Qur'ān speaks of the sending down of a Book or a revelation or a prophet or a messenger, it always attaches the conditional phrase, *Min qabl* (before) or *Min Qablik* (before you), and nowhere does it employ or suggest an expression like *min ba'd* (after you). Even if other verses of the Holy Qur'an had not been explicit about the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ and about the cessation of revelation, the mode of expression adopted by the Holy Qur'ān in the present verse would in itself have been sufficient to prove these points.

The God-fearing have Faith in the Hereafter

The other essential quality of the God-fearing mentioned in this verse is that they have faith in *Al-Ākhirah* (the Hereafter). Lexically the *Akhirah* signifies 'that which comes after something'; in the present context, it indicates a relationship of contrast with the physical world, and thus signifies the other world which is beyond physical reality as we know it and also beyond the sensuous or rational perception of man. The Holy Qur'an gives to the Hereafter other names too - for example, *Dar al-Qarar* (the Ever-lasting Abode), *Dar al-Hayawān* (the Abode of Eternal Life) and *Al-'Uqba* (the Consequent). The Holy Qur'ān is full of vivid descriptions of the Hereafter, of the joys of heaven and of the horrors of hell. Although faith in the Hereafter is included in faith in the unseen which has

already been mentioned, yet the Holy Qur'ān refers to it specifically because it may, in a sense, be regarded as the most important among the constitutive elements of faith in so far as it inspires man to translate faith into practice, and motivates him to act in accordance with the requirements of his faith. Along with the two doctrines of the Oneness of God and of prophethood, this is the third doctrine which is common to all the prophets and upon which all the Shari'ahs are agreed.[4]

Faith in the Hereafter: A revolutionary belief

The belief in the Hereafter, among Islamic doctrines, is the one whose role in history has been what is nowadays described as revolutionary, for it began with transmuting the morals and manners of the followers of the Holy Qur'ān, and gradually gave them a place of distinction and eminence even in the political history of mankind. The reason is obvious. Consider the case of those who believe that life in the physical world is the only life, its joys the only joys and its pains the only pains, whose only goal is to seek the pleasures of the senses and the fulfilment of physical or emotional needs, and who stubbornly refuse to believe in the life of the Hereafter, in the Day of Judgment

4. There is a deplorable misconception with regard to the Hereafter, quite wide-spread among those who are not, or do not want to be, familiar with the Holy Qur'ān and who have at the same time been touched by the rationalism, materialism and libertarianism of the Western society, which makes them cherish certain mental and emotional reservations at least about the horrors of hell, if not about the joys of heaven. Some of them have gone to the preposterous length of supposing that these are the inventions of the 'Ulama' whom they describe as 'abscurantists' - of course, in the jargon of the Western Reformation and of the so-called Enlightenment. They ignore the obvious fact that faith in the Holy Qur'ān necessitates faith in every word of the Holy Qur'ān, and that it is not possible to affirm one part of the Book while denying another and yet remain a Muslim-- أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ : "What, do you believe in one part of the Book and deny another?"(2:85) Moreover, these enlightened Muslims have never made a serious attempt to take into account the complex historical factors that led to the rise of the Enlightenment in Europe, nor the meaning of the subsequent development in ethical ideas. We may, therefore, give a few and very brief indications. There has been no dearth, even in the hey-day of the Enlightenment, of thinkers who have had no scruples in dispensing with ethics altogether which they look upon as superstition or tyranny and hence a blight for the human personality.

Continued

and the assessment of everyone's deeds, and in the requital of the deeds in the other world. When such people find the distinction between truth and falsehood, between the permissible and the forbidden, interfering with the hunt for the gratification of their desires, such differentiations naturally become intolerable to them.

Now, who or what can effectively prevent them from committing crimes? The penal laws made by the state or by any other human authority can never serve either as real deterrents to crime or as agents of moral reform. Habitual criminals soon grow used to the penalties. A man, milder or gentler of temperament or just timid, may agree to forego the satisfaction of his desires for fear of punishment, but he would do so only to the extent that he is in danger of being caught. But in his privacy where the laws of the state cannot encroach upon his freedom of action, who can force him to renounce his pleasures and accept the yoke of restraints? It is the belief in the Hereafter and the fear of Allah, and that alone, which can bring man's private behaviour in line with his public behaviour, and establish a harmony between the inner state and the outer. For the God-fearing man knows for certain that even in the secrecy of a well-guarded and sealed room and in the darkness of night somebody is watching him, and somebody is writing down the smallest thing he does. Herein lies the secret of the clean and pure society which arose in the early days of Islam when the mere sight of a Muslim, of his manners and morals, was enough to make non-believers literally fall in love with Islam. For

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(Continued) But even those thinkers who have recognised the indispensable need for regulations and rules, if not principles, for human conduct in order to preserve social order or to make social life possible, have in general had no qualms about discarding the very idea of divine sanction - despite the intimation of Voltaire, the arch-priest of relationalism, that man would have to invent God, even if He did not exist. As to the nature and origin of the ethical regulations and the sanction behind them, Western thinkers have from time to time tried to promote various agencies - the sovereign state, social will or convention or custom, the supposedly pure and innocent nature of man himself with its capacity for self-regulation, and finally biological laws. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the withering away of all these ethical authorities which has left the modern man without even a dim prospect of constructing a new illusion. It is only in this perspective that one can properly consider the significance of the belief in the hereafter for human society.

true Faith in the Hereafter, certitude must follow Oral Affirmation.

Before we proceed, we may point out that in speaking of faith in the hereafter as one of the qualities of the God-fearing, the Holy Qur'ān does not use the word *yu'minūna* (believe) but the word *yūqinūna* (have complete certitude), for the opposite of belief is denial, and that of certitude is doubt and hesitation. Thus, we find a subtle suggestion here that in order to attain the perfection of *'Īmān* it is not enough to affirm the hereafter orally, but one must have a complete certitude which leaves no room for doubt - the kind of certitude which comes when one has seen a thing with one's own eyes. It is an essential quality of the God-fearing that they always have present before their eyes the whole picture of how people will have to present themselves for judgment before Allah in the hereafter, how their deeds will be assessed and how they will receive reward or punishment according to what they have been doing in this world. A man who amasses wealth by usurping what righfully belongs to others, or who gains petty material ends by adopting unlawful means forbidden by Allah, may declare his faith in the hereafter a thousand times and the Shari'ah may accept him as a Muslim in the context of worldly concerns, but he does not possess the certitude which the Holy Qur'ān demands of him. And it is this certitude alone which transforms human life, and which brings in its wake as a reward the guidance and triumph promised in verse 5 of this Sūrah:

أُولٰٓئِكَ عَلٰى هُدًى مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَ أُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ

It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord; and it is just these who are successful.

Verses 6-7

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَاَنْذَرْتَهُمْ اَمْ لَمْ تُنْذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ۝ خَتَمَ اللّٰهُ عَلٰى قُلُوْبِهِمْ وَعَلٰى سَمْعِهِمْ ؕ وَعَلٰٓى اَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ ۖ وَّلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيْمٌ ۝

Surely for those who have disbelieved, it is all the same whether you warn them or you warn them not: they would not believe. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes there is a

covering; and for them there lies a mighty punishment. (Verses 6-7)

After affirming the Holy Qur'ān as the Book of Guidance and as being beyond all doubt, the first five verses of the present Surah refer to those who derive full benefit from this Book and whom the Holy Qur'ān has named as *Mū'minūn* (true Muslims) or *Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing), and also delineate their characteristic qualities which distinguish them from others. The next fifteen verses speak of those who refuse to accept this guidance, and even oppose it out of sheer spite and blind malice. In the time of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم there were two distinct groups of such people. On the one hand were those who came out in open hostility and rejection, and whom the Holy Qur'ān has termed as *kafirūn* (disbelievers); on the other hand were those who did not, on account of their moral depravity and greed, had even the courage to speak out their minds and to express their disbelief clearly, but adopted the way of deceit and duplicity. They tried to convince the Muslims that they had faith in the Holy Qur'ān and its teachings, that they were as good a Muslim as any and would support the Muslims against the disbelievers. But they nursed denial and rejection in their hearts, and would, in the company of disbelievers, assure them that they had nothing to do with Islam, but mixed with Muslims in order to deceive them and to spy on them. The Holy Qur'an has given them the title of *Munāfiqūn* (hypocrites). Thus, these fifteen verses deal with those who refuse to believe in the Holy Qur'ān - the first two are concerned with open disbelievers, and the other thirteen with hypocrites, their signs and characteristics and their ultimate end.

Taking the first twenty verses of this Sūrah together in all their detail, one can see that the Holy Qur'ān has, on the one hand, pointed out to us the source of guidance which is the Book itself, and, on the other, divided mankind into two distinct groups on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of this guidance - on the one side are those who have chosen to follow and to receive guidance, and are hence called *Mū'minūn* (true Muslims) or *Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing); on the other side are those who reject the guidance or deviate from it, and are hence called *Kāfirūn* (disbelievers) or *Munafiqūn* (hypocrites). People of the first kind are those whose path is the object of the prayer at the

end of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ : "the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace", and people of the second kind are those against whose path refuge has been sought غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ "Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

This teaching of the Holy Qur'ān provides us with a fundamental principle. A division of mankind into different groups must, in order to be meaningful, be based on differences in principle, not on considerations of birth, race, colour, geography or language. The Holy Qur'ān has given a clear verdict in this respect:

خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَّمِنْكُمْ مُّؤْمِنٌ

"It was He that created you: yet some of you are disbelievers and some of you are believers" (64:2).

As we have said, the first two verses of this Sūrah speak of those disbelievers who had become so stubborn and obstinate in their denial and disbelief that they were not prepared to hear the truth or to consider a clear argument. In the case of such depraved people, the usual way of Allah has always been, and is, that they are given a certain kind of punishment even in this world - that is to say, their hearts are sealed and their eyes and ears stopped against the truth, and in so far as truth is concerned they become as if they have no mind to think, no eyes to see and no ears to listen. The last phrase of the second verse speaks of the grievous punishment that is reserved for them in the other world. It may be observed that the prediction that: لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ : "they shall not believe" is specifically related to those disbelievers who refused to listen to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and who, as Allah knew, were going to die as disbelievers. This does not apply to disbelievers in general, for there were many who later accepted Islam.

What is *Kufr* ? (Infidelity)

As for the definition of *kufr* (disbelief), we may point out that lexically the word means to hide, to conceal. Ingratitude is also called *kufr*, because it involves the concealing or the covering up of the beneficence shown by someone. In the terminology of the Sharī'ah, *kufr* signifies the denial of any of those things in which it is obligatory to believe. For example, the quintessence of *'Īmān* as well as the very

basis of the Islamic creed is the requirement that one should confirm with one's heart and believe with certitude everything that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has brought down to us from Allah and which has been established by definite and conclusive proof; therefore, a man who has the temerity to question or disregard even a single teaching of this kind will be described as a *kāfir* (disbeliever or infidel).

The meaning of '*Indhār*' (warning) by a Prophet

In translating the first of these two verses, we have used the English verb 'to warn' for the Arabic word *Indhār*. This word actually signifies bringing news which should cause alarm or concern, while *Ibshār* signifies bringing good news which should make people rejoice. Moreover, *Indhār* is not the ordinary kind of warning meant to frighten people, but one which is motivated by compassion and love, just as one warns one's children against fire or snakes or beasts. Hence a thief or a bandit or an aggressor who warns or threatens others cannot be called a *Nadhīr* (warner). The latter is a title specially reserved for the prophets عليهم السلام , for they warn people against the pains and punishments of the other world out of their compassion and love for their fellow men. In choosing this title for the prophets, the Holy Qur'ān has made the subtle suggestion that for those who go out to reform others it is not enough merely to convey a message, but that they must speak to their listeners with sympathy, understanding and a genuine regard for their good.

In order to comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the first of these verses tells him that some of the disbelievers are so vain, arrogant and opinionated that they, in spite of recognizing the truth, stubbornly persist in their refusal and are not prepared to hear the truth or to see obvious proofs, so that all the efforts he makes for reforming and converting them will bear no fruit, and for them it is all one whether he tries or not.

The next verse explains the reason, that is, Allah has set a seal on their hearts and ears, there is a covering on their eyes, all the avenues of knowing and understanding are thus closed, and now it would be futile to expect any change in them. A thing is sealed so that nothing may enter it from outside; the setting of a seal on their hearts and ears

also means that they have altogether lost the capacity for accepting the truth.

The Holy Qur'ān describes the condition of these disbelievers in terms of their hearts and ears having been sealed, but in the case of the eyes it refers to a covering. The subtle distinction arises from the fact that an idea can enter the heart from all possible directions and not from one particular direction alone, and so can a sound enter the ears; an idea or a sound can be blocked only by sealing the heart and the ears. On the contrary, the eyes work only in one direction, and can see only the things which lie in front of them; if there is a covering on them, they cease to function. (See Mazharī)

Favour withdrawn by Allah is a punishment

These two verses tell us that the other world is the place where one would receive the real punishment for one's disbelief or for some of one's sins. One may, however, receive some punishment for certain sins even in this world. Such a punishment sometimes takes a very grievous form - that is, the divine favour which helps one to reform oneself is withdrawn, so that, ignoring how one's deeds are to be assessed on the Day of Judgment, one keeps growing in disobedience and sin, and finally comes to lose even the awareness of evil. In delineating such a situation certain elders have remarked that one punishment for an evil deed is another evil deed which comes after, and one reward for a good deed is another good deed which comes after. According to a *Ḥadīth*, when a man commits a sin, a black dot appears on his heart; this first dot disturbs him just as a smudge on a white cloth is always displeasing to us; but if, instead of asking Allah's pardon for the first sin, he proceeds to commit a second, another dot shows up, thus, with every new sin the black dots go on multiplying till the whole heart turns dark, and now he can no longer see good as good nor evil as evil, and grows quite incapable of making such distinctions. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم added that The Holy Qur'ān uses the term *Ra'n* or *Rain* (rust) for this darkness: as in Mishkāt from the Musnad of Aḥmad and Tirmidhī.

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No. But what they did has rusted their hearts (83:14)

According to another authentic Ḥadīth reported by Tirmidhī from the blessed Companion Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said, "When a man commits a sin, his heart grows dark, but if he seeks Allah's pardon, it becomes clear again". (See Qurṭubī)

It should be carefully noted that in announcing that it is all one whether the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم warns the disbelievers or not, the Holy Qur'an adds the condition *'Alaihim* (for them), which clearly indicates that it is all one for the disbelievers alone, and not for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , for he would in any case get a reward for bringing the message of Allah to his fellow-men and for his efforts to teach and reform them. That is why there is not a single verse in the Holy Qur'ān which should dissuade the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from calling even such people to Islam. From this we may infer that the man who strives to spread the Word of Allah and to reform his fellow-men does always get a reward for his good deed, even if he has not been effective.

A doubt is removed

We may also answer a question which sometimes arises in connection with the second of these two verses that speaks of the hearts and the ears of the disbelievers having been sealed and of their eyes being covered. We find a similar statement in another verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No. But what they did has rusted their hearts. (83:14)

which makes it plain that it is their arrogance and their evil deeds themselves that have settled on their hearts as a rust. In the verse under discussion, it is this very rust which has been described as 'a seal' or 'a covering'. So, there is no occasion here to raise the objection that if Allah Himself has sealed their hearts and blocked their senses, they are helpless and cannot be held responsible for being disbelievers, and hence they should not be punished for what they have not themselves chosen to do. If we consider the two verses (2:7 and 83:14) together, we can easily see why they should be punished - in adopting the way of arrogance and pride they have, wilfully and out of their own choice, destroyed their capacity for accepting the truth, and thus they

themselves are the authors of their own ruin. But Allah, being Creator of all the actions of His creatures, has in verse 2:7 attributed to Himself the setting of a seal on the hearts and the ears of the disbelievers, and has thus pointed out that when these people insisted, as a matter of their own choice, on destroying their aptitude for receiving the truth, Allah produced, as is His way in such cases, the state of insensitivity in their hearts and senses.

Verses 8-20

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّقُوْلُ اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ
بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ ۝ يُخٰدِعُوْنَ اللّٰهَ وَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا ۚ وَمَا يَخْدَعُوْنَ اِلَّآ
اَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُوْنَ ۝ فِيْ قُلُوْبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللّٰهُ مَرَضًا ۚ
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ اَلِيْمٌ ۢ بِمَا كَانُوْا يَكْذِبُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا قِيْلَ لَهُمْ لَا
تُفْسِدُوْا فِي الْاَرْضِ قَالُوْٓا اِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُوْنَ ۝ اَلَآ اِنَّهُمْ هُمُ
الْمُفْسِدُوْنَ وَلٰكِنْ لَّا يَشْعُرُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا قِيْلَ لَهُمْ اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ
النَّاسُ قَالُوْٓا اَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَآ اٰمَنَ السُّفَهَآءُ ۭ اَلَآ اِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَآءُ
وَلٰكِنْ لَّا يَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا قَالُوْٓا اٰمَنَّا ۚ وَاِذَا
خَلَوْا اِلٰى شَيٰطِيْنِهِمْ قَالُوْٓا اِنَّا مَعَكُمْ اِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُوْنَ ۝
اَللّٰهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِيْ طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُوْنَ ۝ اُولٰٓئِكَ
الَّذِيْنَ اشْتَرَوُا الضَّلٰلَةَ بِالْهُدٰى فَمَا رَبِحَتْ تِّجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوْا
مُهْتَدِيْنَ ۝ مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا ۚ فَلَمَّآ اَضَآءَتْ
مَا حَوْلَهٗ ذَهَبَ اللّٰهُ بِنُوْرِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِيْ ظُلُمٰتٍ لَّا يُبْصِرُوْنَ ۝
صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُوْنَ ۝ اَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَآءِ فِيْهِ
ظُلُمٰتٌ وَّرَعْدٌ وَّبَرْقٌ ۚ يَجْعَلُوْنَ اَصَابِعَهُمْ فِيْٓ اٰذَانِهِمْ مِّنَ
الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ ۭ وَاللّٰهُ مُحِيْطٌۢ بِالْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۝ يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ
يَخْطَفُ اَبْصَارَهُمْ ۭ كُلَّمَآ اَضَآءَ لَهُمْ مَّشَوْا فِيْهِ ۙ وَاِذَآ اَظْلَمَ

عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوْا ط وَلَوْ شَآءَ اللّٰهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَاَبْصَارِهِمْ ط اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝

And among men there are some who say, "We believe in Allah and in the Last Day", Yet they are no believers. They try to deceive Allah and those who believe, when they are deceiving none but their ownselves, and they are not aware. In their hearts there is a malady, so Allah has made them grow in their malady; and for them there lies a grievous punishment, for they have been lying. And when it is said to them, "Do not spread disorder on the earth", they say, "We are nothing but reformers." Beware, it is, in fact, they who spread disorder, but they are not aware. And when it is said to them, "Believe as people have believed," they say, "Shall we believe as fools believe?" Beware, it is, in fact, they who are the fools, but they do not know. And when they meet those who believe, they say, "We have entered Faith;" but when they are alone with their Satans, they say, "Indeed, we are with you; we were only mocking." It is Allah who mocks them, and lets them go on wandering blindly in their rebellion. These are the people who have bought error at the price of guidance; so their trade has brought no gain, nor have they found guidance. Their case is as if a man kindles a fire, and when it illuminates everything around him, Allah takes away their lights and leaves them in layers of darkness -- they see nothing. Deaf, dumb and blind, they shall not return. Or (it is) like a rainstorm from the sky carrying darkness, thunder and lightning; they thrust their fingers in their ears against thunderclaps for the fear of death, and Allah encompasses the disbelievers -- and lightning (all but) snatches away their eyes; every time a flash gives them light, they walk by it; and when darkness grows upon them, they stand still. And if Allah willed, He would certainly take away their hearing and their eye: surely Allah is powerful over everything. (Verses 8 - 20)

As we have seen, the Sūrah Al-Baqarah opens with the declaration that the Holy Qur'ān is beyond all doubt. The first twenty verses of the Sūrah delineate the features of those who believe in the Holy Qur'ān

and of those who do not -- the first five dealing with the former, under the title of *Al-Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing); the next two with those disbelievers who were quite open and violent in their hostility -- that is, *Al-Kafirūn* (the disbelievers or the infidels), and the following thirteen with those crafty disbelievers who claimed to be Muslims but, in reality, were not so. This second variety of the disbelievers has received from the Holy Qur'ān the name of *Al-Mūnāfiqūn* (the hypocrities).

Of these thirteen verses, the first two define the characteristic behaviour of the hypocrites thus:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّقُوْلُ اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ

> And among men there are some who say, 'We believe in Allah and in the Last Day',

yet they are no believers. They try to deceive Allah and those who believe, when they are deceiving none but their ownselves, and they are not aware. These verses expose their claim to be Muslims as false and deceitful, and show that they are only trying to be clever. Obviously, no one can deceive Allah - probably they themselves could not have had such a delusion. But the Holy Qur'ān equates, in a way, their attempt to deceive the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Muslims with the desire to deceive Allah Himself (See Qurṭubī)

Such a desire, the Holy Qur'ān points out, can have only one consequence - they end up by deceiving no one but themselves, for Allah Himself cannot possibly be deceived, and Divine Revelation protects the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from all trickery and deceit, so that the hypocrites themselves will have to bear, in the other world as well as in this, the punishment for their presumptuousness.

The third verse indicates why the hypocrites behave so foolishly and why they fail to see the folly of their course:

فِىْ قُلُوْبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللّٰهُ مَرَضًا

> In their hearts there is a malady, so Allah has made them grow in their malady.

Now, illness or disease, in the general medical sense, is a state in which a man has lost the balanced proportion of the elements within

him necessary to keep him healthy, so that his body can no longer function properly, which may finally lead to his total destruction. In the terminology of the Holy Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, the word 'disease' is also applied to certain mental or psychic states (we are using the two terms in the original and more comprehensive sense) which hinder man from attaining any degree of spiritual perfection, for they gradually deprive him of the ability to perform good deeds, and even of ordinary human decency, till he meets with his spiritual death. The great spiritual master, Junaid of Baghdad, has said that just as the diseases of the body arise from an imbalance among the four humours, the diseases of the heart arise from a surrender to one's physical desires. According to the present verse, the disease hidden in their hearts is unbelief and rejection of the truth, which is as much a physical sickness as a spiritual one. It is all too obvious that being ungrateful to one's creator and nourisher and going against His commandments is to be spiritually sick. Moreover, to keep this disbelief concealed for the sake of petty worldly gains and not to have the courage to speak out one's mind is no less a disease of the soul. Hypocrisy is a physical disease too in so far as the hypocrite is always shuddering for fear of being exposed. Jealousy being a necessary ingredient of hypocrisy, he cannot bear to see the Muslims growing stronger in the world, and yet the poor hypocrite cannot even have the satisfaction of unburdening his heart of the venom. No wonder that all this tension should express itself in physical ailment.

As for Allah making them grow in their malady, it means that they are jealous of the growing strength of the Muslims, but it is Allah's will to make the position of the Muslims even stronger, as they can see for themselves, which feeds their bile and keeps the disease of their hearts growing.

The fourth and the fifth verses expose the sophistry of the hypocrites - their activities threatened to produce a general chaos and disorder, and yet, in their mealy-mouthed way, they pretended to be men of good will and to be serving the cause of peace and order. The Holy Qur'ān makes it clear that oral claims alone do not decide the question whether one is working for order or disorder, for what thief would call himself a thief? It depends on what one does, not on what

one says. If a man's activities do result in mischief, he will be called a mischief-maker, even if he had no such intention.

These two verses, thus, describe the state of their insensitivity and ignorance - they regard their defects as merits. The sixth verse shows the other aspect of this depravity - the merit of others (that is, the unalloyed faith of the Muslims) changes into a defect, and even becomes contemptible in their eyes.[5]

This verse also places before the hypocrites a criterion of true faith (*'Īmān*): اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ النَّاسُ :"Believe as people have believed". According to the consensus of commentators, the Arabic word *Nās*: الناس (people) in this verse refers to the blessed Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ because it is just these 'people' who had embraced the Faith and had accepted the Holy Qur'ān as the word of Allah while it was being revealed. So, the verse indicates that the only kind of *'Iman* (faith) acceptable to Allah is the one which should be similar to that of the blessed Companions, and that the *'Īmān* of others would be worthy of the name only when they believe in the same things in the same way as the Companions did. In other words, the *'Īmān* of the Companions is a touchstone for testing the *'Īmān* of all the other Muslims; any belief or deed which departs from their faith and practice, however pleasing in its looks or good in its intention, is not valid according to the Sharī'ah. There is a consensus of commentators on this position. One should also notice that the hypocrites used to call the blessed Companions 'fools' (*Sufahā'*). This has always been the way of those who go astray - anyone who tries to show them the right path is, in their eyes, ignorant and stupid. But who could, the Holy Qur'ān points out, be more stupid than the man who refuses to see clear signs?

In the seventh verse, we see the double-facedness and trickery of the hypocrites. In the company of the Muslims, they would vociferously declare their faith in Islam; but, going back to their own

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5. As for the hypocrites declaring openly that they were not prepared to believe as others did believe, and as for their dubbing the Muslims as fools, it is obvious that they could have been so outspoken only before the poor among the Muslims, otherwise they used to be very careful about keeping their disbelief concealed.)

people, would reassure them that they had never left the way of their ancestors, and had been meeting the Muslims only to make fun of them.

The eighth verse is a comment on this attitude of complacency and self-congratulation on the part of the hypocrites. They are mightily pleased with themselves in the belief that they can so easily make a fool of the Muslims and get away with it, while they are, in fact, only making a fool of themselves. For Allah has, in His forbearance and mercy, given them a long rope, but this is a provision for their being thrown into ridicule. It took place like this. Since the hypocrites saw no apparent signs of divine punishment descending on themselves, they were encouraged in their complacency and rebellion, so that the cup of their iniquity was full, and one day they were caught. Allah acted like this in response to their mockery; so, the Holy Qur'ān describes this divine action too as a mockery on the part of Allah.

The ninth verse shows the basic denseness of the hypocrites - how they failed to make use of the ordinary sense of discrimination. They had grown up in a pagan society, and knew very well what the way of the infidels was. Now they had become familiar enough with Islam too, and could easily see the difference. But, in their greed, and for the sake of petty worldly profit, they still chose disbelief as against Islam, and bartered away something as invaluable as *'Īmān* (faith) for something as worthless, and even harmful as *kufr* (infidelity). In giving the name of 'trade' or 'commerce' to this action, the Holy Qur'ān suggests that these worldly-wise men had no understanding even of the art of trading.

The last four verses bring out the miserable plight of the hypocrites with the help of two extended similes. The choice of two examples is meant to divide the hypocrites into two kinds of men. On the one hand were those in whom disbelief had taken deep roots, so that they had little inclination towards Islam, but pretended to be Muslims for worldly motives - the Holy Qur'ān compares them to the man who, having found light, again loses it, and is left in darkness. On the other hand were those who did recognize the truth of Islam, and sometimes wished to be genuine Muslims, but worldly interests would not allow them to do so, and they remained in a perpetual state of

hesitation and doubt - they have been likened to the men caught in a thunderstorm who move forward a step or two when there is a flash of lightning, but, when it is over, again get stuck. In the course of these parables, the hypocrites have also been warned that they are not beyond the power of Allah, and that He can, as and when He likes, take away their sight and hearing, and even destroy them.

Injunctions and related considerations

(1) It has sometimes been debated as to whether the distinction between *Kufr* (infidelity or disbelief) and *Nifāq* (hypocrisy) still holds good even after the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The correct position with regard to this question is this. At that time, there were two ways of identifying a hypocrite and declaring him to be one - either Allah Himself informed the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم through revelation that such and such a man was not a Muslim at heart but a hypocrite, or a man through some word or deed overtly repugnant to the Islamic creed or practice showed himself up as a hypocrite, thus providing a clear evidence against himself. Divine revelation having ceased with the departure of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from this world, the first way of identifying a hypocrite is no longer available, but the second way is still valid. That is to say, if a man is found, on certain evidence, to be guilty, in word or deed, of rejecting or opposing or distorting or holding in scorn the basic doctrines of Islam undeniably established by the Holy Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth* and *ijmā'* (consensus), he would be regarded as a *Munāfiq* (hypocrite) in spite of his claim to be a true Muslim. The Holy Qur'ān gives such a hypocrite the name of a *mulhid* or heretic- اَلَّذِيْنَ يُلْحِدُوْنَ فِيْٓ اٰيٰتِنَا : "Those who distort Our verses", 41:40), and the *Ḥadīth* calls him a *zindīq*. One must also add that since the *kufr* (infidelity) of such a man has been proved by clear and definite evidence, the *Sharī'ah* will not put him in a separate category, but deal with him as it would deal with any other *kāfir* (infidel). That is why the authentic scholars are unanimous in concluding that after the departure of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the question of hypocrites ceased to be a relevant one - now anyone who is not a genuine Muslim will be regarded as *kāfir*. The famous author, *Al-'Ainī*, in his commentary on Al-Bukhārī, reports from Imām *Mālik* that after the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم this is the only available means of identifying 'hypocrisy', and that a man who carries this mark could be called a hypocrite.

(2) A little reflection on these verses would reveal the true nature of Islam and *'Īmān* (faith) and also that of *kufr* (disbelief), for the Holy Qur'an reports the claim of the hypocrites to be Muslims: اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ :"we believe in Allah", (2:8), forthwith refutes this claim: وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ :"yet they are no believers". In order to understand fully the implications of these verses, one should bear in one's mind the fact that the hypocrites in question were actually Jews. Now, belief in Allah and in Hereafter is, no doubt, an essential part of their creed as well; what was not included in their creed, as defined by their religious scholars, was the belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم . In declaring their faith in Islam, the Jews very cleverly used to leave out the belief in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and mention only two elements: belief in Allah and belief in the Hereafter. So far as such a declaration goes, they cannot be called liars, and yet the Holy Qur'ān refutes their claim to be Muslims, and regards them as liars. Why?

The fact is that, for one to be a Muslim, it is not sufficient merely to declare one's faith in Allah and the Hereafter in any form or manner which suits one's individual or collective fancy. As for that, associators of all kinds do, in one way or another, believe in Allah and consider Him to be Omnipotent[6] but the Holy Qur'ān does not allow any of these things to pass for *'Īmān* (faith). *'Īmān* or faith in Allah must, in order to be valid and worthy of the name, conform to what the Holy Qur'ān specifically lays down with regards to the divine names and attributes; similarly, belief in the Hereafter can be valid only when it is true to the specifications of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*.[7]

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6. Even peoples described by the Westerners as "savages" or "primitives - though "degenerates" would be far closer to the mark - have at least a vague notion of a Supreme Deity, and ususally very vivid ideas about the other world.

7. There is no end to the making of books, and no end to the making of gods and to the naming of gods - above all, in our own day. Reason, Nature, Man, Life, all having served their turn and grown rusty, are being replaced by more fancy names - "the ground of being" of the so-called Christian Existentialism, the ultimate "archetype of the Collective Unconscious" of Jungian psychology, and what not. They have lately invented a goldless theology too.

In the light of this explanation one can see that the Jews who pretended to be Muslims believed neither in Allah nor in the Hereafter according to these definite requirements. For, on the one hand, they regarded the Prophet 'Uzair or Ezra عليه السلام as the son of God, and, on the other, cherished the fond belief that the progeny of the prophets, no matter how it acted, would always remain 'the chosen of God', and would not be called to account on the Day of Judgment, or at the worst receive only a token punishment. These being their beliefs, the Holy Qur'ān rightly rejects their claims to faith in Allah and the Hereafter.

(3) As we have already said, verse 13 defines what *'Īmān* (faith) really is: اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ النَّاسُ :"Believe as other men have believed". In other words, the criterion for judging one's claim to *'Īmān* is the *'Īmān* of the blessed Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and any claim to *Iman* which does not conform to it is not acceptable to Allah and to the Holy Prophet ﷺ . If a man has the presumption[8] to interpret an Islamic doctrine or verse of the Holy Qur'ān in a way which departs from the explicit and clear explanation provided by the Holy Qur'ān itself or by the Holy Prophet ﷺ , his individual opinion and belief, no matter how much it titillates the palate of his contemporaries or feeds their fancy, will have no value or validity in the eyes of the *Sharī'ah*. For example, the *Qādiānīs* [9] claim that like Muslims they too believe in the doctrine of the Finality of the Prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ, but in this respect they deviate from what the Holy Prophet ﷺ has himself stated, and what the Companions believed in, and distort the doctrine so as to make room for the prophethood of Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad of Qādian; so, according to the indication of the Holy Qur'ān, they come under this indictment: مَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ :"They are no believers."

In short, if a man interprets an Islamic doctrine in a way which is repugnant to the *'Īmān* of the blessed Companions, and yet claims to be a Muslim on the basis of his adherence to this doctrine and also performs his religious duties exactly like Muslims, he will not be considered a *Mu'min* (true Muslim) until and unless he agrees to conform to the criterion of *'Īmān* laid down by the Holy Qur'ān.

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8. As is all too common these days.

9. Who style themselves as Ahmadis.

Removal of a doubt

We may also dispel a misunderstanding which often arises - and is more often made to arise with an ulterior motive - with regard to the famous dictum in the *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) that the 'people of the Ka'bah' (*Ahl al-Qiblah*), that is, those who turn towards the Ka'bah in offering prescribed *Salah* cannot be branded as infidels. The verse under discussion clearly defines the meaning of the phrase, *Ahl al-Qiblah*. The term pertains only to those who do not deny any of the basic essential doctrines and commandments of Islam which are called the *Darūriāt* (essentials). For that matter even the hypocrites mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān used to offer their prayers exactly as the Muslims did; but turning towards Ka'bah while praying was not taken to be sufficient to make them acceptable as true Muslims, simply because they did not have faith in all the essentials of Islam as the blessed Companions did.

Lying is contemptible

(4) The verse اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ :"We believe in Allah and in the Last Day" shows us how disgusting it is to tell a lie - even the hypocrites, with all their hostility to Islam, tried to refrain from it as far as possible. In claiming to be Muslims, they used to mention only their faith in Allah and in the Day of Judgment, but left out the faith in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم for fear of telling a lie.

Misbehaving Prophets is to misbehave with Allah

(5) These verses denounce the hypocrites for trying to be clever with Allah Himself and to deceive Him, although no one among them could probably have had such an intention or even thought of such a possibility. What they were actually doing was to try to deceive the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims. Allah has equated this effort with an attempt to deceive Him, and has thus indicated that a man who is in any way impertinent to a prophet or a man of Allah is ultimately guilty of being impertinent to Allah Himself - this should be true above all in the case of the Holy Prophet ﷺ who stands in his station at the head of all created beings.

The curse of telling lies

(6) There is another subtle and very significant point here. According to these verses, the hypocrites would meet with a grievous

punishment for having told lies. Now, their greatest crime was disbelief and hypocrisy in matters of faith, and they had been committing other crimes as well, like nursing envy and malice against Muslims in their hearts and actually conspiring against them. And yet here the grievous punishment has been connected with their habit of telling lies. This is an indication that basically this nefarious habit was their real crime, which gradually led them to hypocrisy and disbelief. In other words, although hypocrisy and disbelief are much greater crimes, yet they arise from the habit of telling lies. That is why the Holy Qur'ān combines the sin of lying with the sin of idol worship in the same phrase:

فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ ۝

"Guard yourselves against the filth of idols and against telling lies" (22:30)

Who are reformers and mischief-makers

(7) As these verses report, when the hypocrites were asked not to spread disorder in the land through their prevarication and double dealing, they used to reply emphatically: إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ :"We are nothing but reformers." The word *Innamā* (nothing but), used in the Arabic text, indicates not merely emphasis but exclusivity. So, their reply would mean that they were nothing but reformers, the servants of order, and that their activities could have nothing to do with disorder. Commenting on their reply, the Holy Qur'ān says:

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَٰكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ۝

"Beware, it is, in fact, they who spread disorder, but they are not aware."

Now, we learn two things from this comment. Firstly, the activities of the hypocrites did actually produce disorder in the land. Secondly, they did not indulge in these activities with the express intention or design of creating disorder - they were not even aware of the possibility that their actions could be the cause of disorder. For, among the things which spread disorder in the world, there are some which are commonly recognized to be mischievous and disorderly activities, and hence every sensible and conscientious man refrains from them e.g., theft, robbery, murder, rape etc.; on the other hand, there are some which in their external aspect do not appear to be mischief or

disorder, but, working unseen, they have the necessary consequence of destroying the morals of men which, in its turn, opens the door to all kinds of disorder.

This is exactly what the hypocrites were doing. No doubt, they refrained from theft, robbery etc.; it was on this count that they denied their being mischievous, and emphatically asserted that they were serving the cause of order. But all this while they had been freely giving vent to their malice and envy by conspiring with the enemies of the Muslims. These are things which finally bring man down to the level of beasts. Once he has lost his awareness of ethical values and human decency, even an average man becomes an agent of social disorder - of a disorder much greater than that released by thieves or robbers, or even beasts are capable of producing. For, the mischief of robbers and beasts can be controlled by the physical power of law and government. But laws are made and enforced by men. What happens to laws, when man has ceased to be man, can easily be witnessed all around us in the world of today. Everyone takes it for granted that humanity is on the march and the modern man is so far the ultimate in civilization; the network of educational institutions covers every hamlet on the face of the earth; legislative bodies keep buzzing night and day; organizations for the promulgation of laws spend billions, and circumlocution offices proliferate. And yet crime and disorder keep in step with the march of civilization. The reason is simple.

Law is not an automatic machine; it requires men to make it work. If man ceases to be man, neither laws nor bureaucratic agencies can provide a remedy for the all-pervading disorder. It is for this that the greatest benefactor of mankind, the Holy Prophet ﷺ, concentrated all his attention on making men real men - in all the plenitude of the term. Once this has been achieved, crime or disorder comes to an end of itself without the help of enormous police forces and extensive system of law-courts. As long as people acted upon his teachings in certain parts of the world, man saw a kind of peace and order prevail the like of which had never been witnessed before nor is likely to be witnessed when these teachings are abandoned or disregarded.

In so far as actual practice is concerned, the essence of the

teachings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is fear of Allah and solicitude for the assessment of one's deeds on the Day of Judgment. If these are absent, no constitution or legal code, nor administrative body or university can force or induce man to keep away from crime. Those who run the world in our day invent ever-new administrative measures to prevent crime, but they not only neglect the very soul of administration, the fear of Allah, but even deploy the means of destroying it - all of which has the necessary consequence that the remedy only helps to feed the malady.

To another aspect of the question, it is easy enough to find a cure for thieves and robbers and for all those who create disorder openly. But the miscreants who have been described in these verses always appear in the garb of reformers, brandishing colourful schemes of social amelioration which are only a mask for personal interests, and for raising the slogan, إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ :"We are nothing but reformers." Hence it is that Allah, while asking men not to spread disorder on the earth, has also said in another place:

وَاللّٰهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ ط

"And Allah knows the one who makes mischief distinct from him who promotes good." (2:220)

This is an indication that Allah alone[10] knows the states of men's hearts and their intentions, and He alone knows the nature and consequences of each human deed as to whether it would help the cause of order or of disorder. So, to serve the cause of order, it is not sufficient merely to possess such an intention; much more essential than that is to orient oneself in thought and deed in harmony with the *Sharī'ah*, for an action may, in spite of the best intentions, sometimes result in mischief and disorder, if it is not guided by the *Sharī'ah*.

Verses 21-22

يٰٓاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِىْ خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِيْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ۝ اَلَّذِىْ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْاَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَّالسَّمَآءَ

10. Can distinguish between order and disorder, for He alone.

بِنَآءً وَّاَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَاَخْرَجَ بِهٖ مِنَ الثَّمَرٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ
فَلَا تَجْعَلُوْا لِلّٰهِ اَنْدَادًا وَّ اَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝

O men, worship your Lord - who created you and those before you, so that you may become God-fearing - who made the earth a bed for you and the sky a roof, and sent down water from the sky, then through it brought forth, out of fruits, provision for you. So, do not set up parallels to Allah when you know. (Verses 21-22)

A review of verses linked together

The second verse of the Sūrah 'Al-Baqarah' provides the answer to the prayer made in the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ:"Guide us in the straight path"- that is to say, the guidance man has prayed for is present in this book, for the Holy Qur'ān is from the beginning to the end a detailed account of the straight path. Then, the Surah proceeds to divide men into three groups according to whether they accept the guidance of the Holy Qur'ān or not. Three verses speak of the true and God-fearing Muslims, who not only accept but also act upon the guidance, and the next two verses of those disbelievers who oppose it openly.

Then come thirteen verses dealing with the hypocrites who are hostile to this guidance, but, for the sake of petty worldly interests or in seeking to harm the Muslims, try to keep their disbelief concealed and to present themselves as Muslims. Thus, the first twenty verses of the Surah, in dividing men into three groups on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of the guidance, indicate that the proper criterion for dividing men into groups is neither race or colour, nor language nor geography, but religion. Hence those, who believe in Allah and follow the guidance He has provided in the Holy Qur'ān, form one nation, and those who disbelieve form a different nation - the Holy Qur'ān calls the former the 'party of Allah' and the latter - 'the party of Satan' (58:19-22)

Then, the present verses (21 and 22), addressing the three groups together, present the message for which the Holy Qur'ān has been revealed. In asking men to give up the worship of created beings and to worship Allah alone, they adopt a mode of expression which not only

makes an affirmation but also supports it with arguments so clear that even an average man, only if he uses his common sense, cannot help being convinced of the Oneness of God.

Commentary :

In starting the address, verse 21 uses the Arabic word *An-nās*, which signifies man in general, or man as such - so, the word covers all the three groups we have just mentioned. And the message delivered by the verse is: اُعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمُ : "Worship your Lord." The Arabic word *'Ibādah* (worship) connotes expending all energies one has in total obedience to somebody, and shunning all disobedience out of one's awe and reverence. (Rūh-al-Bayān) We have earlier explained the meaning of the word *Rabb* (one who gives nurture). Let us add that the choice of this particular name from among the Beautiful names of Allah is very meaningful in the present context, for the affirmation has thus been combined with the argument in a very short sentence. The word *Rabb* indicates that only He is, or can be, worthy of being worshipped, He is the final and absolute Cause of nurturing man - Who changes man through gradual stages of development from a drop of water into healthy, sentient and rational being, and Who provides the means for his sustenance and growth. This truth is so obvious that even an ignorant or intellectually dull man would, on a little reflection, not fail to see and admit that such a power of nurturing can belong only to Allah, and not to a created being. What can a creature do for man, when it owes its very existence to the Creator? Can a needy one come to the help of another? And if it appears to be doing so, the act of nurturing must in reality and ultimately belong to the One Being on whom both have to depend in order to exist at all. So, who else but the *Rabb* can be worthy of adoration and worship?

The sentence is addressed to all the three groups of men, and for each it has a different meaning. "Worship your Lord": the phrase calls upon the disbelievers to give up worshipping created beings and to turn to the Creator; it asks the hypocrites to be sincere and true in their faith; it commands the sinning Muslims to change their ways and try to be perfect in their obedience to Allah; and it encourages the God-fearing Muslims to be steadfast in their worship and obedience, and to make a greater effort in the way of Allah (Rūh-al-Bayān).

The two verses proceed to enlarge upon the theme by specifying certain special qualities of the *Rabb*: اَلَّذِیْ خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ :"Who created you and those before you." This is a quality which one cannot even imagine to belong to a created being, for it can pertain only to the Creator - that is, the quality of giving existence to what did not exist before, and of producing from the darkness and filth of the mother's womb a creature as lovely and noble as man.

In adding to the phrase: اَلَّذِیْ خَلَقَكُمْ :"who created you" the words, وَالَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ "and those before you," the verse shows that Allah alone is the Creator of all mankind. It is also significant that the verse mentions only "those before you" and not "those who will come after you", and through this omission suggests that there will not be any *Ummah* (a traditional community formed by all the followers of a prophet) to succeed the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, for no prophet will be sent down after the Last Prophet ﷺ, and hence no new *'Ummah'* will arise.

The final phrase of verse 21 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ has been translated here as "so that you may become God-fearing". It may also be translated to mean "So that you may save yourselves from hell", or "So that you may guard yourselves against evil." But the point is that one can hope to attain salvation and paradise only when one worships Allah alone, and does not associate anyone else with Him.

Before we proceed, we must clarify a very important doctrinal point. The phrase (لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ) which has been translated here as "so that you may become God-fearing" employs the Arabic particle *l'alla* which indicates an expectation or hope, and is used on an occasion when it is not definite that a certain action or event would necessarily be actualized. Now, if one does really possess *'Īmān* (faith) and does really believe in *Tauḥīd*, one would, in consequence definitely attain salvation and go to Heaven, as Allah Himself has promised. But here the certainty has been expressed in terms of an expectation or hope in order to make man realize that no human action by itself and in itself can bring salvation as a necessary reward. One can attain salvation and go to Heaven only by the grace of Allah alone. The ablility to perform good deeds, and *'Īmān* itself is only a sign of divine grace, not the cause.